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TAGS: [PREL](#) [EAIR](#) [PTER](#) [MCAP](#) [PHUM](#) [CU](#) [VE](#) [BF](#)
SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER INGRAHAM SEEKS CLOSE TIES WITH U.S.

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i., D. Brent Hardt for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

Summary

1. (C) On June 13, the Charge called on Prime Minister Ingraham to congratulate him on his recent election and to review U.S. and Bahamian priorities in advance of the June 18-21 Conference on the Caribbean. In a productive 45-minute meeting, Ingraham promised to consider a Proliferation Security Initiative agreement, new legislation on trafficking in persons, and measures to restrict access of Haitian sloops to Bahamian waters -- three top Post priorities. Ingraham agreed to actively support human rights initiatives in the UN, and was receptive to U.S. concerns on Venezuela and Cuba. Ingraham came across as open to U.S. views, eliciting our reaction to Bahamian plans to privatize airport security and move a vendors market nearby the downtown port facility. Ingraham requested U.S. support in expanding Defense Force facilities for counter-drug and migrant operations on Great Inagua island and in meeting costs of the most costly extradition cases. Ingraham said he intended to raise concerns in Washington about the looming gap in OPBAT capabilities after the withdrawal of Army helicopters this fall. He also expressed appreciation for continued INL support of the Bahamian drug enforcement unit. The friendly, open meeting was an encouraging start to relations with the new government, and left no doubt that Ingraham intends to make close relations with the U.S. a priority. END SUMMARY.

U.S. Welcomes Early Action on Key Issues

2. (C) The Charge paid his initial Courtesy call on Prime Minister Hubert Ingraham June 13 to review the upcoming Conference on the Caribbean and highlight top U.S. priorities for the coming year. Ingraham apologized for the delay in the meeting date, noting that his protocol department, inherited from the previous government, had only recently advised him of the Embassy's request. The Charge observed that the U.S. enjoys a special relationship with the Bahamas, reflected in our close law enforcement partnerships such as OPBAT and a history of close economic and personal ties. He

said the U.S. looked forward to deepening our partnership in the coming years. He thanked Ingraham for the quick action his government had already taken on a number of outstanding issues. He welcomed the government's focus on improving airport security, its decision to increase Defense Force funding to acquire additional maritime assets, and its decision to hire outside legal counsel to try the high-profile Kozeny fraud extradition. He also conveyed appreciation for the rapid approval of a new monitor installation at the U.S. Navy's Atlantic Undersea Testing and Evaluation Center in The Bahamas, which had languished for nine months under the previous government.

Ingraham Concerned About OPBAT Gap

¶3. (C) Ingraham affirmed his commitment to building a close and mutually beneficial relationship with the U.S. during his tenure in office. He said he was looking forward to traveling to Washington and meeting with the President. He said he hoped to be able to register his concern about the importance of continuing U.S. support for OPBAT during the Conference. With the Army planning on withdrawing its helicopters in October 2007 and replacement aircraft not expected until late 2008, he feared that a diminished operational capacity could reopen The Bahamas to drug trafficking just as flows are on the rise from Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Ingraham also said he planned to note his appreciation for State Department INL funding of training and other programs for the Bahamas Drug Enforcement Unit, and urge continuing support for the programs.

Ingraham Solicits U.S. Views on Air and Seaport Changes

¶4. (C) Turning to his top domestic issues, Ingraham reaffirmed his commitment to resolving security problems at the airport. He noted that he was actively considering privatizing security at the airport to the Vancouver-based YVRAS company that had recently been awarded the overall contract to manage the airport. Ingraham commented that the Bahamian civil service was not well suited to staffing security-sensitive positions at the airport because of limited ability to enforce accountability. He solicited the Charge's thoughts on such a shift, which post had informally suggested to the previous government precisely to address weaknesses in accountability. The Charge said he would review the issue with the Transportation Security Administration and CBP, but welcomed the Prime Minister's willingness to explore new ways to address the central issue of accountability at the airport.

¶5. (C) Ingraham also said he was considering privatization of seaport management in Nassau, again removing civil service employees from sensitive security positions. As part of planned renovation of the Nassau port, Ingraham asked for U.S. input on the potential relocation of the Straw Market -- the local Bahamian market for cruise tourists -- into the port area. Charge thanked Ingraham for seeking U.S. input, and noted that activities at the port fell under the International Port Security code. As long as the proposed development was consistent with the code's requirements, security issues should be adequately addressed. The Charge noted that the U.S. Coast Guard would certainly be willing to work with Bahamian port authorities to address any potential security issues arising from the relocation.

PM Open to PSI

¶6. (U) The Charge highlighted the strong U.S. interest in concluding a Proliferation Security Initiative agreement with the Bahamas, given The Bahamas position as the third largest ship registry country in the world. Their participation, he emphasized, was vital to the overall success of this important anti-terrorism framework. He briefly reviewed the status of discussions with the previous government and outlined the two options for moving forward -- a new agreement and the easier route of an amendment to our

existing Comprehensive Maritime Agreement. Ingraham admitted that he had been unaware of PSI, but expressed a willingness to review the issue and get back to us on the way forward. Charge provided the Prime Minister with an outline of the agreement and its goals as background.

Government Committed to Extradition but Seeks Help

¶7. (SBU) Responding to the Charge's comment on support for the ongoing extradition case involving Victor Kozeny, the Pirate of Prague, Ingraham said his government would meet its extradition treaty obligations. At the same time, he expressed concern that the costs of some cases could rise to levels that the Bahamas could not sustain. (Comment: Kozeny has a well-funded defense team that has overwhelmed the Bahamian Attorney General's office, resulting in a frustrating lack of action on the case under the previous administration. End Comment.) Ingraham said he had just budgeted \$500,000 to hire counsel from Britain to handle the complex fraud case, and while he was prepared to do this to meet treaty obligations, he said he would like to explore with us ways we might share expenses in high-value, high-cost cases. He posited a cap on Bahamian outlays in excess of an agreed cost. Charge agreed to raise the matter with the Department of Justice and other U.S. authorities and get back to the Prime Minister.

Stemming the Drug Flow from Haiti

¶8. (C) The Charge said that he had co-chaired a healthy exchange of views the week before at the U.S.-Bahamas Counterdrug and Migrant Joint Task Force meeting that had focused on the increasing flow of drugs from Haiti. Noting that the projected new assets for the Bahamian defense force would improve Bahamian capability to interdict this flow, he said The Bahamas could further assist law enforcement efforts by restricting access or improving tracking of unregistered Haitian sloops in Bahamian waters. The Charge suggested the government consider a complete ban on wooden-hulled commercial vessels along the lines of a similar U.S. measure. At a minimum, the government should mandate minimum safety measures and formal requirements for registration and marking of vessels to assist in tracking the flow of these vessels.

¶9. (C) Ingraham agreed to consider alternatives for better tracking of Haitian vessels, but registered concern about the impact of a sloop ban on trade, noting that the sloops typically carry discarded Bahamian goods back to Haiti, which benefit many poor Haitians. As part of improved interdiction efforts, he also discussed his plans to expand the Bahamian Defense Force presence on Great Inagua Island, the Bahamian island closest to Haiti. In light of the potential benefits of an expanded base and improved harbor to U.S. operations in the Windward Passage, Ingraham solicited U.S. support in developing the base. The Charge promised to review the request with SOUTHCOM, whose Commanding Officer was planning on visiting the Bahamas in July.

Bahamas Open to Trafficking in Persons Legislation

¶10. (U) The morning of the courtesy call, local papers carried detailed reports the 2007 TIP report. Ingraham asked about the report and its background. Charge and PolOff outlined how the report was prepared and why the Bahamas had been identified as a special case. Ingraham said he would be willing to support the report's main recommendation -- to pass legislation specifically addressing human trafficking, saying: "we will have no difficulty getting legislation to address trafficking." In an encouraging sign, Ingraham asked why the Embassy had not directly approached Bahamian law enforcement if it received complaints of potential trafficking: "If you guys tell us specifically where it is happening, we will take action and go after the traffickers." Charge thanked Ingraham for his openness to our recommendations, and noted the importance of protection for

victims so they would be willing to have their cases discussed with law enforcement without fear of deportation.

Improved UN Cooperation Likely

¶11. (U) The Charge briefed Ingraham on the Embassy's discussions with the previous government regarding human rights issues in the UN, and said he hoped we could count on his government to speak out on human rights issues in international fora. Given our shared values and belief in democracy, he added, our countries should be able to work closely together to address human rights violations wherever they occur. Ingraham responded with a very direct, "but of course," and affirmed his strong support for human rights issues.

Iran-Venezuela Ties, Transition in Cuba

¶12. (C) The Charge took the opportunity to register U.S. concern over growing Venezuela-Iran ties, noting that new direct flights from Iran and the weak Venezuelan travel regime could undermine hemispheric efforts to block the transit of transnational terrorists. The Charge said Venezuela's flirtations with Iran also threatened to undermine USCS resolutions 1737 and 1747, and asked for continued Bahamian support to ensure safe travel in the region. Ingraham was unaware of the issue and thanked the Charge for bringing the matter to his attention. Noting Ingraham's strong support for human rights, the Charge requested support for a democratic transition in Cuba. The Charge said that it was vital that the people of Cuba are given the same chance to choose their government that Bahamians and Americans enjoy.

Comment

¶13. (C) The Prime Minister was relaxed but sharply focused on the issues, befitting his reputation as a hard-driving leader determined to act and get things done. While the U.S. enjoyed a solid partnership with the previous government, Ingraham is likely to be a more effective and more strongly U.S.-oriented partner. He will be more willing than former PM Christie to take risks and put himself on the line if he believes backing us on specific issues is in his country's long-term interest. His openness to U.S. input on changes at the air and seaports is a welcome sign that he will be open to U.S. views and will not be hamstrung by anxieties about being too close to the U.S. Ingraham has also shown that he is willing to put resources into our relationship by funding the Kozeny extradition prosecution and in his commitment to enhancing the Bahamian Defense Force's capacity to support U.S. drug and migrant operations. We also expect the new government will more closely track U.S. interests within the UN and on counter-terrorism matters including PSI. The Conference on the Caribbean offers a good opportunity to cement what has been a promising start to relations with the Ingraham government.

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